LIBERTY

A STATEMENT OF THE BRITISH CASE

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I

THE SURFACE

IN 1908 Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was a violation of the Treaty of Berlin, 1878, and an outrage upon the feelings of the inhabitants. The Press of Europe pointed out the violation of a treaty, but the feelings of the inhabitants did not make good copy. Nobody attempted to stop the annexation. Russia, the one Great Power in-

terested enough to wish to stop it, was then too weak to do anything effective; of which fact Austria was well aware. Russia could only sit still and look glum. The leader of the Austrian Nationalist party responsible for the annexation was the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, a charming man whose married life was an idyll, but an out-and-out royalist and military reactionary animated by one idea, namely that the earth exists in order that the ruling classes may rule it.

The Archduke took his wife to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and showed himself and her triumphantly in the streets on the

occasion of a national holiday, Sunday, 28th June, 1914. They were both murdered. Europe seemed more horror-struck than surprised. The assassination was accomplished by an Austrian subject in Austrian territory, but Austria was convinced that the plot had been laid at Belgrade, and later she announced that a secret judicial inquiry had proved as much. Austria accused the Servian Cabinet, not of complicity in the particular crime, but of fostering a general secret campaign against the cohesion of Austro-Hungary, and late on July 23rd she delivered an ultimatum to Servia, and demanded an answer for the next day but one, 25th. This

ultimatum (as to which Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, said that he "had never before seen one State address to another independent State a document of so formidable a character") prescribed under ten heads exactly what Servia was to do if she wished to survive. The sixth head laid it down that the Austrian Government was to take part in a criminal trial of accessories to the archducal murder under Servian justice at Belgrade.

The Viennese Press of the 25th July showed that Vienna neither desired nor expected Servia to bow to the ultimatum. Servia did bow to the whole of the ultimatum except

the sixth head, and at the end of her reply she offered, if Austria was not satisfied, to arbitrate at The Hague. Sir Edward Grey considered the Servian reply so abject that it "involved the greatest humiliation to Servia that he had ever seen a country undergo."

THE WORLD'S GREATEST WAR IN TEN DAYS

Austria treated this reply as a blank negative, and prepared to chastise Servia. Russia, now stronger, and remembering 1908, and anxious about the balance of power in that part of the world, began to mobilize on the Austrian frontier. Germany

announced, what all knew, that she would stand by Austria, and it was notorious that France would have to stand by Russia. German and Russian diplomats had some ornate vocal passages as to whether Russia was or was not arming on the German frontier as well as on the Austrian frontier. Sir Edward Grey endeavoured to maintain peace between Russia and Austria by suggesting a joint mediation on the part of Germany, France, Italy and England. Germany refused—very politely, while asseverating her ardent desire for peace. Every Power asseverated the same ardent desire for peace. Emperors thee'd and thou'd each

other, and sent their affectionate letters to the papers. Sir Edward Grey tried again, and offered to support any form of mediation that might commend itself to Germany. Germany again said No. Sir Edward Grey tried yet again, and offered to support any reasonable suggestion of any sort from Germany in aid of peace, even if in so doing he had to oppose his friends France and Russia. It was useless.

The next remarkable thing was that some German soldiers entered Luxembourg, and some others took possession of a Belgian railway station. And instantly afterwards Belgium knew that either she must be smashed

or she must help Germany against France by giving the German army a free pass through her territory. She appealed to England against Germany, France having just given a specific promise to respect her neutrality.

Now, by the treaty of 1839 Prussia, like France, had positively bound herself to respect the independence and neutrality of Belgium—so positively indeed that when she was asked in 1870 to renew the bond, she righteously answered that in view of the existing treaty such a renewal was superfluous. However, she did solemnly renew her covenant by the treaty of 1870. By the latter treaty,

to which England was a party, England undertook, if either France or Prussia violated Belgian neutrality while the other respected it, to co-operate with the belligerent who respected Belgian neutrality against the belligerent who violated it.

Great Britain replied to Belgium's appeal by an ultimatum to Germany. And Germany, having already declared war on Russia and France, declared war also on Great Britain. Within ten days of Austria's ultimatum to Servia, five of the greatest European Powers, each protesting that its sole passion was peace, and that it hated war, were at war about the vital, world-shaking question — whether

Servia ought to let Austrian delegates go to Belgrade and assist judicially in the trial of accessories to an assassination. And spiders spun their webs in the empty halls of the Peace Palace at The Hague.

II

BENEATH THE SURFACE

THE theatrical performance thus given by continental diplomats deceived no one, and could not conceivably have deceived any one. And it would be impossible to understand why the continental Embassies and Foreign Offices should have troubled themselves to put up such an inane show, were one not acquainted—from revelations like the recently published Memoirs

of Crispi—with the ignoble, infantile, cynical, and altogether rascally mentality which characterizes those gaming saloons where the happiness of nations is the stake.

The Austro-Servian difficulty was the occasion, not the cause, of the European war. It was not even one of the causes. It was like a match, picked out of a box of matches by an incendiary, to set light to a house previously well soaked in kerosene. To study the half-burnt match, to stick it under a microscope and differentiate it from other matches, would be a supreme exercise in absurdity.

Let us go back a little, but not

too far back. In 1875 Germany, perceiving that France was making a marvellous recovery from the catastrophe of 1870, had the idea of going to war with her again at once and so finally destroying her as a great nation. This infamous and wanton scheme was scotched by the opposition of England and Russia. It has stamped Germany with dishonour for a hundred years, and it showed clearly the spirit of the German autocracy based on military power. Bismarck, the mighty villain who planned it, improved his theory of morals somewhat in old age, but in due season he was turned off; and altogether one may say that France

since 1875 has never been free from the threat of another German invasion. After a long period of isolation and danger France made a military alliance with Russia; she was driven to it by the continual menace of Germany; it was the best thing she could do.

Meanwhile the cult of the German army grew, and the German military caste gradually discovered what a marvellous instrument it possessed in the German people—a people docile, ingenuous, studious, industrious, idealistic, and thorough; but above all docile and thorough. German commerce increased astoundingly; the energy of the race seemed illimitable;

its achievements in sheer civilization became brilliant; for example, the municipal government of cities such as Frankfort is of a quality unequalled in the world. The autocracy availed itself of all the talents shown, and in particular it exploited German docility so ruthlessly that the German Social-Democratic party of protest passed from infancy to full manhood in a decade, and speedily developed into the most powerful section of the Reichstag. To understand how the military caste dealt with the Reichstag it is necessary to read von Bülow's artless book, "Imperial Germany." Von Bülow was Imperial Chancellor for eight

years, and he records the monstrous chicane of the military caste against the people with true German ingenuousness.

The people were informed by the military caste of the unique grandeur of their army, and of the indomitable resolve of rulers and of God never to let Germany be crushed by her enemies. The best qualities of the race were turned to evil, and its worst quality, a certain maladroit arrogance, was appealed to. The army and God were more and more the staple subjects of official speeches, and the result has been a national obsession of such completeness that ladies have to take to the gutter in order to make

room for the swagger of Prussian officers three abreast on the pavements of enlightened German cities, and the Kaiser himself has closely fraternized with the sinister Krupp family.

THE PREACHERS OF CONQUEST

An immense literature of bellicosity flourished around the obsession. In this literature the indomitable resolve of Germany not to be crushed, and the intentions of the army (helped by a new navy) are set out with thoroughness; although no space is wasted in giving details of the alleged disgraceful attempts to crush Germany. No other nation in the world has ever

produced a war literature comparable to Germany's; no other nation has said one-hundredth part about the inevitableness of war.

The notorious specimens of this literature are too well known to require description. I will, however, briefly refer to von Bernhardi's "Germany and the Next War," not because it is a good book even of its kind, but because it is the most popular of the kind. The ingenuous volume, in which a staggering simplicity of mind is united to a total lack of imagination, a miraculous misunderstanding of politics, and a touching ignorance of human nature, is explicitly a disparagement of peace

and peace-propaganda and an advocacy of war. It proceeds from strange assumptions (as that the British army "may be left out of account in a continental war") to still stranger conclusions (as that all nations and individuals except Germany and Germans will in the end act according to the dictates of the lowest and stupidest cunning, to the final glory of Germany). The most ingenuous and significant chapter in the work is the second, entitled "The Duty to Make War." Here von Bernhardi naïvely quotes the aged Bismarck's repeated clear declaration in the Reichstag that "no one should ever take upon himself the

immense responsibility of intentionally bringing about a war," and then states that Bismarck did not mean what he said, and that what he did mean is difficult to discover! All this chapter is an attempt to justify the deliberate provoking of war for an unavowed end. Note this sentence, which is worthy of italics: "*We must not think merely of external foes who compel us to fight—a war may seem to be forced upon a statesman by the state of home affairs.*"

Von Bernhardi, being in this book a bit of a philosopher and dealer in general principles, does not outline actual schemes of offence; but other military propagandists do. Among

these not the least interesting is General von Edelsheim, a member of the General Staff of the German army, whose memorandum ("Operations upon the Sea") as to the proper way to defeat the United States, now so justly popular in America, could only have appeared with the approval of the Kaiser. Von Edelsheim—one may be permitted to recall—begins by stating that Germany cannot meekly submit to "the attacks of the United States" for ever, and that she must ask herself how she can "impose her will." He proves that a combined action of army and navy will be required for this purpose, and that after about four weeks from the com-

mencement of hostilities German transports could begin to land large bodies of troops at different points simultaneously. Then, "by interrupting their communications, by destroying all buildings serving the State, commerce, and defence, by taking away all material for war and transport, and lastly, by levying heavy contributions, we should be able to inflict damage on the United States." Thus, in New York, the new City Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Pennsylvania Railway Station, not to mention the Metropolitan Tower, would go the way of Louvain, while New York business men would gather in Wall Street humbly to hand over

the dollars amid the delightful strains of "The Watch on the Rhine" and the applause of Professor Münsterburg.

EFFECT OF THE RUSSIAN PEASANT

The grandiose military legend, fostered by the German military caste and in turn by repercussion exciting that caste to a fury of arrogance, was, beyond any reasonable argument, the father of the present war. Its mother was the fecundity of the Russian peasant. In the last thirty years the population of Russia has increased by fifty millions; in the last twenty years it has increased by as much as the total population of France. By consequence the Russian

conscript army and Russian military power have similarly increased.

The German military caste had for years on its own printed showing wanted a war, and it had infected much of Germany with the itch to fight. It had wanted a war, not merely to show off its unparalleled war-machine in world-conquest, but also because of "the state of home affairs" mentioned by von Bernhardi. The largest party in the Reichstag was its opponent, and that party was growing rapidly and continuously, a fact not surprising to any one familiar with the anti-democratic antics of the caste in influencing social legislation. . . . And there was the Russian

army, increasing and increasing and increasing, by reason of the dreadful fecundity of the Russian peasant!

The instinct of self-protection ranged itself with the desire for conquest. Indeed, it is possible that the caste was a year or two ago struck by a sort of panic in contemplating the growth of Russia—not only in numbers, but also in intelligence. The anti-Russian movement in Germany became a major phenomenon. Like all the propaganda of the caste, in Europe as well as in America, it has had its University champion. Professor Schiemann has been, and is, the acknowledged anti-Russian professor, and his operations have been

marked by the usual German in genuousness. In London last year he said openly, and with all the authoritativeness of his position, that a war with Russia, and therefore a general European war, must occur within eighteen months. It has occurred. The military caste had waited forty-four years; it could wait no longer. It could no more stop the Russian army from growing than it could stop its hair from growing. In a year the new three-years conscript system would be in operation in France, and the French army correspondingly improved. A pretext for war was an urgent necessity, and the difficulty of finding it was not

lessened by the fact that nobody whatever had emitted the slightest threat against Germany.

THE SCHEME

Then came the murder of the Austrian heir. The occasion seemed ideal, for it enabled the caste to point out to German and Austrian thrones that God was apparently neglecting His chosen brothers-in-arms, and that they had better take firm action on their own behalf. That the Kaiser was constantly hoodwinked by the caste is shown by the experiences of the late General Grierson as military attaché at Berlin. General Grierson was so sickened by the atmosphere

of intrigue in which the Court moved that he refused ever to go to Berlin again. On the whole the caste must have been too much for the Kaiser; nevertheless the Kaiser, who would often very annoyingly flirt with peace, had always to be managed, and the murder of a Teutonic heir-apparent enabled the caste to get at him on his dynastic side. Circumstances appeared to be favourable for a *coup*. The incompetence of the French Government in military administration had just been publicly admitted in the French Senate, and was indeed well known. And the characteristic political simplicity of the caste saw good signs

everywhere. Russia would be in the midst of a revolution, and would also muddle her mobilization. Krupp had deliberately broken his contract with the Belgian Government for big guns, and Belgian forts therefore could not hold out; moreover Belgium would never seriously attempt to resist Germany. America would be sympathetic, because of its horror of Russian barbarism. Italy at worst would be benevolently neutral. And Great Britain would be neutral, partly because of violent civil war from end to end of Ireland, partly because of disaffection in Egypt, India, South Africa, and other places, and partly from self-interest. . . .

The German and Austrian branches of the military caste worked in secret together. And when they had reached a decision—and not before, according to my information—the German Imperial Chancellor and the German Foreign Secretary were permitted to learn the inwardness of the state of affairs. An impossible ultimatum was sent to Servia, and the thing was done. The fall on the Bourses, before the delivery of the Servian reply, showed that the supreme financial magnates had been "put wise." Every Embassy knew. All diplomacy was futile, and most of it was odiously hypocritical. Sir Edward Grey alone in Europe strove

against the irrevocable. With the most correct urbanity Germany frustrated him at each move. Neither France nor Italy desired aught but peace. Whether or not Russia desired war I cannot say: but it is absolutely certain that Germany and Austria desired war, though at the final moment Austria quailed. They have got war, and more than they expected.

GREAT BRITAIN IN THE FRAY

The one genuine manifestation in the last days, among German diplomats and war-lords and their hired journalists, was surprise at the fighting attitude of Great Britain. The hollow periods of the leading articles in the

venal Press by which the caste influences its huge victim were inspired for once with a genuine emotion—that of startled anger. And here is the surpassing proof of the artlessness of the German official mind, so self-satisfied in its cunning.

It is scarcely conceivable that Germany should have expected British statesmen, fully informed of the whole situation, to remain neutral when Germany attacked France. Yet Germany expected just that—nay, counted firmly upon it. I say that Germany counted upon it, for the simple reason that her plan of campaign against France included the invasion of Belgium, which invasion was not only

an appalling and inexcusable crime—the foulest crime against civilization since Napoleon—but a shameless violation of a treaty to which England was a party, and a direct menace to England herself. Germany's intention to invade Belgium was no secret. She never tried to conceal it. Belgium was only a little country and could not invade back. Belgium knew of the intention against her, and several years ago began to take defensive measures accordingly. France was well aware of it; so was Great Britain. Great Britain was under a clear treaty obligation to Belgium. In Germany, by public admission, treaties do not count, and inter-

national honour is an absurdity. Germany, however, is not yet the whole world, and in England a treaty still counts.

Let me be sincere, and admit that Great Britain had a still stronger motive in taking arms—that of self-preservation. The arch-propagandist and strategist, Treitschke, the leader of the whole school of German bellicose writers, followed by his flock, had laid it down that Germany's world-scheme for the spreading of her culture was to dispose of Russia and France first, and then to smash Great Britain. Just as there was no concealment about her minor intention in regard to Belgium, so there was

no concealment about her major intention in regard to Great Britain.

It follows, therefore, that these simple Germans expected Great Britain to wait until her turn came. If Great Britain had sat still and Germany had beaten France once more (whether she defeated Russia or not), it is a certitude that Belgium would have seen the last of her independence, that Holland would have been swallowed at a second gulp, and Denmark at a third; and probably a piece of the north-west coast of France would have rounded off the beauteous territorial perfection of the German Empire. The entire European coast from Memel

to Calais would have been Germany's jumping-off ground for the grand attack on England. In joining in this war Great Britain had nothing to gain, but she had something to keep—her word to Belgium—and she had simply everything to lose by standing out of it. Hence she is in it.

True, she is supporting the alleged barbarism of Russia against the alleged culture of Germany; the respective values of this "barbarism" and this "culture" posterity will determine. But it may be said here that so far as England is concerned, Russia is an accident. England is supporting the most highly

civilized nation and the most peaceful Great Power on the continent of Europe—France. For myself, as an artist, I have to state that I have learnt as much from the art of Russia as from the art of any other country. I may have illusions about the renascence of Russia. Russia may be still a bloodthirsty savage and Germany may be the knight of the Holy Grail. Everything is possible. But Russia happens to be France's ally, and for Great Britain there is no going behind that basic, unalterable fact. Great Britain did not impose on France the Russian alliance. On the other hand Germany, by her endless bullying,

emphatically did impose on France the Russian alliance. Germany's attitude towards France rendered it imperative that France should be able to count on the co-operation of a Power with a great army. Outside the Triple Alliance, Russia was the only such Power. It is the intolerable arrogance of Germany, and nothing else, that has brought into existence the coalition against the Teuton Empires, and the remarkable character of the coalition is yet a further proof of the tremendous resentment which that arrogance has aroused.

III

A NEW CONCEPTION OF WAR

BUT Great Britain, in taking arms for Belgium's, France's, and her own preservation against Germany's repeated and explicit menaces, has also taken arms against the whole conception of war as preached and exemplified by its latest and most terrific exponent. The Kaiser himself, head of the German army, and

many of his responsible officers, had fairly warned us that Germany's notion of war was a new and larger notion than any hitherto known—a notion which added all the resources of science to the thievishness and the sanguinary cruelty of primeval man. War, when they made it, was to be ruthless to the last extreme. And as an earnest of their sincerity, they showed us for many years in peace-time how surpassingly inhuman they could be to their own conscripts. Germany has kept her word. She has changed the meaning of war. She began the vast altercation by a cynical and overwhelming wickedness garnished with the most nauseating

hypocrisy. To gain a preliminary advantage over France she ruined a whole nation. She had said she would do it, and she did it.

And while doing it she has broken every one of the principal "Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land" which she had solemnly signed at The Hague in 1899. She has not broken them once, but again and again, in pursuance of a definite policy. As regards the regulations for war at sea, the German representative at The Hague in 1907, in response to a British proposal to prohibit floating mines, declared that "the dictates of conscience and good feeling would

afford better security than written stipulations." . . . Ah ! . . . The Hague gathering accordingly left this particular matter to the dictates of conscience and good feeling, and many other matters also !

"CONSCIENCE AND GOOD FEELING"

The Hague Conference, for instance, made no rules as to the use of the Press, and when the German Press Bureau caused to be inserted in a serious newspaper like the *Frankfürter Zeitung* a long speech by a prominent English statesman (John Burns) which was pro-German but which was also entirely imaginary, it broke no Hague rule. And it

would be difficult for the Belgian women and children who were often driven before German regiments as a screen against Belgian fire to quote any Hague rule specifically in their favour.

Nor did the Hague Conference prescribe the conditions of travel for non-combatant prisoners-of-war. So that when German soldiers packed twelve hundred male citizens of Louvain—engineers, merchants, lawyers; living and civilized men just like you and me—into a cattle-train at the rate of ninety to a horse-truck, standing jammed and immovable in several inches of animal filth, and shut the trucks up and kept the victims imprisoned without any food or any

drink during a fifty-hour journey to Cologne, and then turned them out to be baited by the populace in the Exhibition Gardens, and then after the baiting gave them each a small portion of black bread, and then drove them—the sane and the insane —into another train, and for two days and three nights during another train-journey again kept them imprisoned without food and drink, and then loosed them (all except the suicides) into a turnip-field at Malines and told them they were free—even the Belgian males, like their women and children, could not easily refer German jurists to the Hague Conference, for the Hague Conference had left such

details to the dictates of conscience and good feeling.

Let us note in passing that after the Louvain episode, and after Belgium stank from end to end with the odour of corpses and of stale powder, the *Lokalanzeiger*, one of the most conscientious and right-feeling newspapers in Germany, referred to Belgium as "*this quarry*, which has been laid low by the German army and which now belongs whole and undivided to the German people." And a Major-General, in the same paper, dotted the *i*'s thus: "All Belgium must become German, not in order that *a few million rascals* may have the honour of belonging to

the German Empire, but so that we may have her excellent harbours and be able to hold the knife under the nose of perfidious, cowardly England."

WAR MADE PERFECT

The story goes that a few weeks ago, when a Belgian princess personally remonstrated with a certain German officer-prince about some outrage or other, the latter shrugged his shoulders and replied in excellent French: "*Que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre.*"

It is.

It may not be magnificent, but it is war. It is what we had been

warned to expect. It is war completed and made perfect.

The German military caste is thorough. On the one hand it organizes its transcendently efficient transport, it sends its armies into the field with both grave-diggers and postmen, it breaks treaties, it spreads lies through the Press, it lays floating mines, it levies indemnities, it forces foreign time to correspond with its own and foreign newspapers to appear in the German language; and on the other hand it fires from the shelter of the white flag and the Red Cross flag, it kills wounded, even its own, and shoots its own drowning sailors in the water, it hides behind women and

children, it tortures its captives, and when it gets really excited it destroys irreplaceable beauty.

These achievements — which have been responsibly and utterly verified, which will become historical, and which I feel sure no member of the General Staff worthy of his post would wish to deny—undoubtedly correspond to a logical conception of war. The conception is based upon the great principle that while a war is being fought out, every other consideration whatever must be subordinated to the consideration of victory. War must be its own law and morality, and the highest virtue is to win. Such a conception of war is

quite comprehensible, and it can be supported by argument; indeed it has been supported by argument — for example, by the Imperial Chancellor in the Reichstag. It is a conception which must assuredly triumph by its own logic if war is to continue as an institution for regulating human affairs.

"PLEASE MAY I EXIST?"

The one flaw in it is that we do not care for it, and we will not have it. We don't want to argue about it. We want to fight about it. And we are fighting about it. Said one of the greatest Americans: "War is hell." The epigram was a masterpiece of conciseness, and the summer of

1914 has demonstrated its accuracy far more thoroughly than ever. We consider that war, in addition to being hell, is idiotic. We declare it to be absurd that half the world should be overrun with ruin in order that a great race may prove its greatness. We admit that in the process of evolution rivalries between nations are not merely unavoidable, but excellent in themselves. What we deny is the assumption of the German military caste that these rivalries must take the form of homicidal war. We maintain that artistic, scientific, and industrial Germany has superbly proved during the last forty years that non-homicidal struggles against other

nations may be waged, and may be carried to brilliant success, without bloodshed, without dishonour, without shame, without weeping. And though we have to acknowledge defeat in certain of those struggles, we wish for nothing better than that such struggles should continue.

We are convinced that our new ideal is a finer one than the ideal of the German military caste, that the two ideals cannot flourish together, and therefore that one of them must go down. If Germany triumphs, her ideal (the word is seldom off her lips) will envelop the earth, and every race will have to kneel and whimper to her: "Please may I exist?" And slavery

will be reborn; for under the German ideal every male citizen is a private soldier, and every private soldier is an abject slave — and the caste already owns five millions of them. We have a silly, sentimental, illogical objection to being enslaved. We reckon liberty —the right of every individual to call his soul his own—as the most glorious end. It is for liberty we are fighting. We have lived in alarm, and liberty has been jeopardized, too long.

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